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GROTESQUE GAMING: THE MONSTROUS IN ONLINE WORLDS

Robert M. Geraci, Nat Recine, and Samantha Fox

ABSTRACT

Videogames and virtual worlds that provoke dread and horror have grown in popularity throughout the twenty-first century. Based on the online games Requiem: Memento Mori and DayZ, this article shows how players relish such dread and enjoy landscapes of the monstrous and the grotesque in order to engage with and tentatively conquer inner fears and anxieties. As such, the game worlds continue the age-old work of horror—to exorcise one's inner fears and demons—but do so with the viscerality that is the hallmark of gaming. Using theoretical analysis, “textual” interpretation, and empirical data garnered through interviews and surveys, we show that Requiem and DayZ produce cathartic experiences associated with long traditions of popular and religious approaches to human fear and sin. It is this visceral engagement with the horrific and monstrous that connects the games and their environments to long-standing folk traditions in pop culture.

KEYWORDS

DayZ, horror, monster, religion, Requiem: Memento Mori, videogame, virtual world

INTRODUCTION

Videogames and virtual worlds are increasingly integral parts of our social and psychological worlds, and some provoke dread and horror in players.¹ Although most online games take place in fantasy or science fiction settings, some explore the grotesque and the horrific. Based on the online games *Requiem: Memento Mori* and *DayZ*, this article shows how players enjoy landscapes of the monstrous and the grotesque in order to engage with and tentatively conquer our inner fears and anxieties. As such, the game worlds continue the age-old work of horror—to exorcise one's demons—but they do so with the viscerality that is the hallmark of gaming. *Requiem* and *DayZ* reveal that in virtual landscapes

it is the other players who evoke the most dread but simultaneously provide the appeal for playing; their agency provides the rationale for player responses to the mere potential for danger and is thus fundamental to every player's travel through the monstrous landscape and effort to rise above the fears that plague him or her.

Requiem and *DayZ* are both multiplayer, online games, but their differences in play style and thematic emphasis reveal the significance of other players in the landscape. *Requiem* is a horror-themed online game, akin to fantasy-based games like *World of Warcraft*, in which players roam a monstrous landscape and complete quests requiring that they defeat enemies, in return for which they earn rewards. *DayZ*, set on post-apocalyptic Earth, has no quest chains to complete or any goal aside from survival. Players can find or take (from one another) better equipment, but they do not gain levels or new powers. While *Requiem* includes player versus player activity, *DayZ* is rife with it, even giving players the capacity to torture one another. Throughout the article, we will highlight specific aspects of the games' stories, play mechanics, and aesthetics to illustrate how these provide or attempt to create a frightening landscape. Ultimately, the fear of others in *DayZ* gives the landscape a power that *Requiem*'s lacks.

DayZ, in particular, thrives on the moment-to-moment dangers of existence, echoing Freudian assumptions about the world. Both "raw" nature (through the dangers of predation, climate, and natural disaster) and culture (in its frustrating domestication of instinct) threaten individuals.² Faced with physical and psychological dangers, human beings imagine them as monsters and seek to master them. Thus, horrific encounters with the monstrous are part of an economy of psychological distress and comfort; in those encounters we engage the unknown and uncanny that permeates our world.³ These new games, then, play an important role in popular culture: they participate in our collective effort to manage our anxieties. They make known the unknown and name the nameless. In doing so, they domesticate our fears.

To appreciate how *Requiem* and *DayZ* offer meaningful experiences by engaging the unknown and evil—particularly because the games use horrific environments and monstrous opponents—requires that we appreciate how religious culture infuses gaming culture. Game research reveals that "certain categories of games satisfy some of the same psychological needs satisfied by religion: providing compensatory status, a sense of community, and transcendence of the material world."⁴ Research on horror in games has not, generally, engaged the question of religion but instead has typically drawn on horror

cinema, as in the excellent work of Kirkland, Krzywinska, and the contributors to Perron's *Horror Video Games*.⁵ Surprisingly, this emphasis on film persists despite the fact that studies of horror and the monstrous themselves frequently refer back to religion.⁶ Recognizing this relationship, Brenda Walter describes two horror games that have clear connections to religious practices and beliefs, and argues that "horrifying digital gameplay might become in and of itself a spiritual action."⁷

Consequently, after explaining our methods of data gathering and interpretation, this article briefly explores the cultural role of the monstrous and of horror in religious studies and psychology. It then describes the ways in which demons and monsters represent sin and fear, connecting these to game play in *Requiem* and *DayZ*, before delving into our empirical data to document the appeal of horrific experiences, the catharsis players feel as a result of playing, and the powerful fear of other human beings that provides the most pleasurable avenue for gaming. Through a method of theoretical analysis, textual reading of the games, and empirical support through interviews and surveys, we show that *Requiem* and *DayZ* produce cathartic experiences associated with long traditions of popular and religious approaches to human fear and sin. This visceral engagement with the horrific and monstrous connects the games to long-standing folk traditions in popular culture. These virtual landscapes have several methodological consequences: (1) that the study of religion has direct relevance to the psychology of game play and to the study of horror; (2) that visual culture leverages social anxieties that provide the basis for our response to our environment; and (3) that the very human search for transcendence often emerges out of our willingness to risk the debasement of everything we value.

METHODOLOGY

This article investigates virtual worlds through a theological and psychoanalytic framework supplemented by data collected from online game forums. We collected forum, survey, and interview data in order to build our interpretation through the players' own claims. The following conclusions thus emerge out of a collaboration between textual analysis of the online worlds and their social orders, and an interview/survey analysis of players who contribute to those structures. In this, we follow the mixed-methods approaches to virtual world and online game studies that have been pioneered early in the twenty-first century.⁸ Eight players completed a twenty-question online survey

about *Requiem* that included an open text opportunity to comment, and more than seven thousand players took a twenty-three-question online survey about *DayZ*. The latter survey yielded hundreds of pages of respondents' comments, which were entered through a final question that prompted the respondents to comment on the survey, add to their answers, or provide any other comments about the game and what they like about it. The entire set of raw data from the *DayZ* survey, which was so enthusiastically engaged thanks to support from the game's creator and subsequent viral distribution, is available online.⁹

As part of a National Science Foundation–sponsored project on the way people have meaningful experiences in virtual worlds, this study engages online games but not single-player games. As such, we do not claim (though it may be valid to do so) that the processes detailed in this article apply to all horrific and monstrous gaming experiences. Though we occasionally draw on theoretical perspectives that emerged out of analyses of single-player games, our own empirical data indicate that the multiplayer element in *Requiem* and *DayZ* is crucial to players' experiences and the feelings of dread and awe that the games provide.

THE PERSISTENCE OF THE MONSTROUS

The presence of grotesque, monstrous, and demonic creatures in popular entertainment satisfies genuine psychological needs, so horror appeals to consumers even as it disturbs them. This resembles religious experiences, where the search for salvation leads unerringly toward the otherness and awful power of beings beyond our ken. Horrific games are part of an economy of social and psychological salvation, engaging our fears and anxieties, and providing us with opportunities to master them. Thus, to understand such games, we must appreciate how human expectations of salvation in any form are already and immediately monstrous.

The typical response to an encounter with the divine is an ambivalent one: the religious person experiences both fear and love. According to the Lutheran theologian Rudolph Otto, gods "may appear to the mind an object of horror and dread, but at the same time it is no less something that allures with a potent charm, and the creature, who trembles before it, utterly cowed and cast down, has always at the same time the impulse to turn to it, nay even to make it somehow his own."¹⁰ This "numinous" experience is frightening and alluring at the same time because gods are so different and powerful, yet through them we find

transcendent salvation. We revel in fear because we believe that our salvation lies somewhere inside it.

The dynamic of allure and dread is at the core of the monstrous and the horrific. Theorists of the supernatural adopted Otto's appreciation for the psychological core of that experience.¹¹ Monsters, such as Anne Rice's vampires, are often both attractive and dangerous. The dread and allure provoked by such monsters—so like the religious experience of the divine—is an irrevocable part of our relationship with them, taking its most extreme form in the sexualized monsters that romp through pop culture. The vampire "provides the best example of the strange human tendency to want the thing hiding under our beds to be in bed with us."¹² This binary of (sexualized) desire and dread is part and parcel of popular and folk culture, as visible in fairy tales—especially in their original forms.¹³ Thus the monster becomes a boundary object between folk history, pop culture, theology, and now digital games.

Just as evolution has seemingly favored a human inclination toward religion, it likewise inclines many people toward the experience of fear. Religion stems, in part, from our capacity to see agency in our environment, a strategy designed to help us avoid danger, but which also leads us to believe that there are forces at work just outside of our immediate awareness.¹⁴ The tendency to turn shadows into stalkers and fallen twigs into footsteps worked necessarily in conjunction with a sense of fear that works better in overdrive than the reverse. We are primed to experience fear, and we naturally tend to see that fear take shape in the periphery of our vision. Our expectation that there are active agents in the world around us provides grist for the religious mill while also giving us cause to expect monsters all around us.

The landscapes of *DayZ* and *Requiem* are filled with monsters, and are themselves monstrous. *DayZ* is a twisted approximation of our world, a barren world of empty towns demented by the infection that leaves many people zombies and effects the transformation of survivors into assassins. *Requiem* ventures further afield, with skeletons and corpses littering a desolate landscape. Both landscapes warn players of impending doom. The eerie stillness is punctuated by the arrival of foes, frequently unseen. And yet players return and travel deeper into these monstrous worlds.

Strange things—the monstrous or weird, according to Otto¹⁵—fascinate us because they evoke quasi-religious dread and desire, but we also pursue that which disturbs us because we desire to control it. Through deliberate exposure to the things we fear, we acclimate ourselves to them. Freud avers that in children "the manifestations of a compulsion to repeat exhibit to a high degree an

instinctual character and, when they act in opposition to the pleasure principle, give the appearance of some 'daemonic' force at work. In the case of children's play we seemed to see that children repeat unpleasurable experiences for the additional reason that they can master a powerful impression far more thoroughly by being active than they could by merely experiencing it passively. Each fresh repetition seems to strengthen the mastery they are in search of.¹⁶ It may seem irrational for children to play games that force them to experience over and again the things they dread (the child appears "possessed"), but such behavior is eminently rational because it is in and through such experiences that psychological comfort emerges. By repeating the painful experience, the child comes to "master" it, and is often better prepared for future encounters. Thus, the desire to experience fear stems from our desire to control it, which is achieved after continuous exposure. Such patterns continue for adults, and are visible in survival-horror gaming.

The compulsion to relive frightening experiences is part of player preferences and design necessities in videogames. Players repeatedly return to dangerous areas or battle monsters that killed them previously. This is generally necessary for progress in games, but to some extent it is also a deliberate player choice to make the game challenging. As one *Requiem* player reports, "I view the most dangerous areas as a challenge. And yes, I usually try to be active in areas that show a higher level of difficulty, since this is also a test for my abilities and the survivability of my character." Thus, when players choose to engage in difficult encounters, they hope to satisfy a basic pleasure of victory and control. The desire for such experiences also drives players to join raiding groups and struggle over and over in order to experience the "epic win" characteristic of finally defeating a powerful opponent.¹⁷

This compulsion to enter into danger, and into threatening landscapes, is familiar to many non-gamers, who want to experience a kind of attention that eludes us in everyday life. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi notes that "in many cases people seek out stimuli that by any ordinary definition would be called unpleasant or threatening."¹⁸ Just as rock climbers and skydivers voluntarily undertake their activities precisely because these make it possible for the participants to voluntarily direct all their attention to one goal, so, too, do these gamers pursue online challenges because, as we shall see, it is in these moments that the participants feel truly alive: "The ability to focus attention is the most basic way of reducing ontological anxiety, the fear of impotence, of nonexistence."¹⁹

Following Freud and Csikszentmihalyi, it is possible to see in-game repetition as a process of psychological mastery. If we link this repetition to the psychology

of demons and monsters—which represent our sins, desires, and fears—then play can be an active medium for the satisfaction of a basic human need to be frightened and participate in the monstrousness and irrationality of the world beyond reason. While stories, myths, and folklore allow us to work through those needs, *Requiem* and *DayZ* give the player a place to go and do so more actively. In this, the games provide the player with a truly meaningful experience.

CULTURAL DEMONS AND MONSTROUS GAMES

Online games hark back to monastic texts where demons represent evil and objectify it as an opponent against whom a monk could fight and emerge, even if only tentatively, victorious. Just as monastic texts transform psychological opponents into demons, online games objectify evil so that it can be conquered. A monstrous body “quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy . . . giving them life and an uncanny independence.”²⁰ Even broad social insecurities can be engaged through monstrous representation, as was the case, for example, in the scapegoating of women in the Salem Witch Trials.²¹ In *Requiem*, monsters are physical opponents to be conquered by the players. In *DayZ*, the monstrosity of human sin emerges primarily in the temptation to steal from and harm other players. As *DayZ* players struggle with (or relish) their own internal demons, zombies roam the landscape as a constant reminder of other evils. Both games provide arenas for the realization of evil, thereby continuing the monstrous trajectories of religious and popular culture, with the more psychologically rich experience of *DayZ* producing a more compelling experience.

Monsters are often the objective realization of religious and cultural sin, serving as a warning and permitting human response to our own evil. Among the Ojibwe (Native Americans also known as the Chippewa), for example, the cannibalistic, greedily hungry wendigo is a response to the threat of overindulgence that “might prove detrimental to the community.”²² For Christians, demons are the religious realization of sins, and their incorporation in mystical texts is a strategic move in the battle against evil: “Monks demonized aspects of their own selves—sexual desire, anger, pride—in a process of externalization and rejection.”²³ Such demonic creatures embody sin and—as they make possible the “reformation of the soul”—they are part of God’s redemptive plan.²⁴ Therefore, the monks battle literal demons to put their inner, metaphorical demons to rest and achieve salvation. One can fight against sin as a demon more clearly than as an abstract concept such as “lust” or “greed.” For this reason, Christian monastic

texts do not describe demons as a supernatural force of the imagination, but rather as living evil.

The connection between monsters and sin persists in the modern era, where, for example, it is transparent in pop culture zombies. The most popular zombies on the early twenty-first-century screen are those of the television show *The Walking Dead*, but these bear little connection to *DayZ* or *Requiem*. *The Walking Dead* show premiered after *DayZ*, though the graphic novel on which the show is based came first. There is no clear evidence that the game was patterned after the comic; however, some players speculate on a connection in online forums, where the majority believe that *DayZ*'s zombies-as-infected-people are not the same as the actual zombies of *The Walking Dead* and that visual similarities are coincidental.²⁵ George Romero's classic films *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and especially *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), however, bear direct relevance to games like *DayZ*. In Romero's films, zombies provide a critique of capitalist consumerism, and this theme persists in videogames.²⁶ Actually, the connection between consumption and human degradation is even older, as early modern playwrights used the bubonic plague as an analogy for selfish accumulation.²⁷ Romero's films indicate that through consumer culture we have become zombies,²⁸ and zombie games subsequently "capitalize" on these pop culture critiques. Thus, surviving the mindless monsters in *DayZ* is inextricably intertwined with the plague of mindless capitalism and simultaneously a revelation of how we are already the diseased—perfectly illustrated when players turn on one another to acquire goods or satisfy their bloodlust.

Just as watching *Dawn of the Dead* might encourage moviegoers to renounce (or at least feel distaste for) their consumerist impulses, playing *DayZ*—even playing as a kind of human monster, a player who kills other players—might remind participants what it means to be human. Player behavior in first-person shooters is often dehumanizing to other players and opponents—such as the fusion of "fun, death, and domination into one" experience in headshot killings.²⁹ This fact demands that we consider the real-world politics of death mechanics.³⁰ It is important to note, however, that some research indicates that immoral game play produces guilt.³¹ The "bandits" and "traitors" of *DayZ*, then, might be developing a moral compass through their immoral acts within the game. Indeed, such results have emerged in laboratory settings: players who played as terrorists in a game felt similar levels of guilt to those who reflected on real events from their pasts, and the players demonstrated moral sensitivity after their game activities.³² Thus the players—*qua* monsters—could be, in a powerful sense, exploring sin toward a greater moral awareness.³³ It is unclear if

such activities lead to increased moral behavior, but clearly the feelings of guilt and newfound moral sensitivity are at least necessary—though not sufficient—for players to improve their real-world behavior through their game play.

Of course, not all players work through such a process. Some prefer to remain among “the good guys.” Becoming a hero is, after all, a common response to the threat of death in games.³⁴ Some players choose to perform moral work in *DayZ*, not simply helping new players, which is fairly standard online gaming practice, but even creating organizations to systematically assist the injured. Groups like the Trusted Medics of the Wasteland and the Reddit Rescue Force have online presences through which players can find someone who will locate the injured character and heal him or her. In our survey, 77 percent of respondents claim to have been healed by strangers at least once, with nearly a quarter of respondents indicating that this happens frequently (a rating of 4 or 5 out of 5). For one player, “*DayZ* is a cruel world . . . but on occasion you find a compassionate soul and the game really begins. Sure you will die 99% of the time but the 1% is where all the ‘*DayZ Stories*’ come from. The hard part is not giving in and becoming that which you hate.” The difficult choice to help other players rather than kill them (out of desire for their equipment or to ensure self-survival) provides a moment where players wrestle with their own monstrous inclinations. For such players, the struggle against evil can be carried out only when one foregoes the opportunity to become a monster, and further empirical evidence on the difference between such approaches is desirable.

Requiem’s monsters range from unnaturally distorted animals such as the “Mutated Sea Lion” to animate objects such as the “Bloody Teddy Bear” and the grotesque “Stabbed Slaughtered Cadaver,” all of which represent the uncanny or the taboo. The inanimate type of monster, in particular, harks back to Sigmund Freud’s writings on the “uncanny,” which he describes as “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.”³⁵ Teddy bears are familiar and beloved objects rendered horrifying and monstrous by their ability to walk, to attack, and to bleed. Following Ernst Jentsch, Freud argues that “a particularly favourable condition for awakening uncanny feelings is created when there is intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one.”³⁶

The uncanniness of such creatures emerges out of the fact that they cannot be appropriately defined. They are neither alive nor dead, neither this nor that. As such, they are what Mary Douglas would classify as taboo because they are, themselves, outside classification.³⁷ The monster is already and always a subject of “category crisis,”³⁸ a fact that is reflected in *Requiem*’s monsters. They are

neither this nor that, but an uncompromising mixture that unnerves us and represents the fears that we must otherwise guard deep inside. Such struggles are particularly interesting in videogames, because the player becomes the hero. While the stories of Perseus defeating the monstrous Medusa or of Belleroophon slaying the Chimera articulate the inner struggle against such enemies, in *Requiem* and *DayZ* we can personally confront the darkness by helping others (e.g., in a *DayZ* medical team), by searching out and defeating hordes of zombies or other monsters, or by taking the part of the monstrous oneself.

Given the unnatural and uncanny that lies at the heart of the monstrous, it should be apparent that our fledgling efforts to conquer horrific creatures are inherently part of a quest to overcome our horror. Just as we reify sin in demons or instantiate the shadowy unknown and unfamiliar in other “secular” monsters, we simultaneously reconstruct evil and give it shape. We form and formulate, and thereby gain opportunities to establish psychological mastery. As such, the monstrous in gaming becomes a strategic move in the psychological and social salvation of human culture.

TALES AND TACTICS OF HORROR

The horrific experience of videogames, and hence their cathartic appeal, emerges when a game produces a constant level of anxiety in players while allowing the players to act on it. *Requiem* and *DayZ* both situate the players in storylines designed to frighten them, and the games reinforce those stories with game mechanics. *Requiem* conditions players to experience visceral fear through its aesthetics and attack mechanics, and by setting apart the “Nightmare Hours.” Some of these features also appear in other virtual worlds and videogames, but they work especially well in *Requiem* because of its massively multiplayer structure and attention to monstrous and grotesque detail in the landscape. The designers of *DayZ* took a different approach: characters slowly weaken from hunger or thirst if they don’t find food and water, death is permanent (you have to start a new character when you die), and the zombie-infested island is a free-for-all in which players can attack one another. These different mechanical approaches serve the same goals: to create an environment in which threats always loom on the horizon and yet where players can turn toward those threats and thereby engage their fears and their humanity.

Scholars of videogames have expanded on Vivian Sobchack’s theory of visceral experience in cinema, while indicating that the embodiment of game play

allows for a more powerful medium. Timothy Crick, for example, notes that “contemporary videogames are phenomenologically experienced in a way that is as spatio-temporal, embodied, immersive, interpellative, visceral, mobile, and animate as that of the cinematic.”³⁹ He also comments, however, that the players’ action are crucial to making game play embodied.⁴⁰ While most of us relish the sympathetic magic of film, games often provide a similar experience, heightened only by the fact that we don’t just identify with but identify ourselves as the character on screen.

Thanks to these kinds of experience, Tanya Krzywinska argues that the most exciting arena for horror in the twenty-first century is in videogames.⁴¹ Yet online players have difficulty finding games to equal the experience of playing the single-player games that launched the survival-horror genre. A cursory search among MMORPG (massive multiplayer online role-playing games) forums reveals players complaining about the lack of online horror games. Many experienced players agree that because MMORPGs are so vast and incorporate such a great number of players, frightening an individual player with the unknown is impossible. It is for this reason that horror-themed first-person shooter games have flourished, including the *Silent Hill* series, *Penumbra Overture*, *Resident Evil*, and the *Diablo* series. A player, alone and in his own world, can be taken unawares. Where only one character enters the game at a time, he does not know what may be coming. Nevertheless, both *DayZ* and *Requiem* have adopted many of the atmospheric and visual elements of the popular first-person horror games in order to provide experiences of horror and the macabre. *DayZ*, by capitalizing on the unknowable presence and choices of other human players, not only equals first-person shooter horror, but exceeds it.

A horrific story sets the stage for both *Requiem* and *DayZ*, though the designers of the former invested more in theirs, in keeping with their goal of creating a complete virtual world. As *DayZ* servers allow only a comparatively small number of players to coexist at one time,⁴² the game may not be a “world” in the same way that *Requiem* is, but it retains a persistent virtual environment occupied by many players simultaneously.⁴³ Regardless of whether it is a complete virtual world, any horror game requires a story to make sense out of the players’ circumstances and immerse them in the environment. In a thread on MMORPG.com, one player writes, “In order for fear to feel authentic and really draw you in, a horror MMORPG will require above everything else, an amazing storyline. Even the monsters themselves are secondary to this one crucial element. Hacking and slashing your way through a level might be exciting and fun, but it isn’t actually scary. Red-eyed creatures leaping out at you from

the darkness will definitely make you jump, but that isn't fear, it's your startle reflex."⁴⁴ It may be that survival-horror games are even more dependent on story than other genres of videogames are.⁴⁵

The *DayZ* story is quite simple, but the designer and players emphasize how it is the players' own narratives that are key to the game. The players are in a post-Soviet state in which a virus has turned the populace into zombies. Wandering through the streets and across the surrounding areas of a deserted city, each player must find food, water, and weaponry while avoiding zombies, other players, and even disease. Although the storyline is simple, it is context for what the players are doing and why, and provides depth to the limping and shambling horrors that chase players across landscape. The power of this approach for *DayZ*'s designer, Dean Hall, is that it opens the virtual world to players writing their own survival stories: "I guess I've always been really passionate about this whole idea of creating persistent worlds, and real, true emergent gameplay. And letting the players come up with the stories. Storytelling is ancient, you know? Storytelling is almost the origin of our language . . . *Day Z* got promoted through people's stories, people were posting them on forums and telling them to each other . . . It was just amazing to see these fascinating interactions, these amazing tensions happening with people, and real emotions."⁴⁶ *DayZ* thus focuses on the players' own stories, allowing its own narrative to recede into the background. And this is something the players adore. In our survey, respondents indicated their joy in making and sharing their stories (via YouTube, for example), their joy in experiencing different stories when they die and create new characters, and the draw of these stories as part of the game's allure. "I genuinely care about my character," wrote one respondent, "and I've walked nearly all the map developing some amazing stories along the way."

The storyline of *Requiem* is more involved, as befits a massive multiplayer environment. The action takes place on the planet Ethergia, where racial conflicts led to a war among the planet's eight races. As part of their genocidal efforts, the competing races tapped into illegal "ionic" energies, which tore the continents of Ethergia apart. Radiation caused mutations among the wildlife, which now threatens the intelligent races. Such mutation, like the viral transformation of *DayZ*'s zombies, perhaps reveals our collective fear of global transformation, from climate change to neoliberal political and economic manipulations. Each player takes on a heroic role and strives to ensure her race's safety in the crumbling world. One player even feels that this "underlying story" is itself frightening, perhaps in consonance with the tidal shifts in human life and history that the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries have brought.

The atmosphere is crucial within *Requiem*. A horror becomes merely action adventure once the monsters are visible and present;⁴⁷ it is their presence offscreen, the threat of their appearance, and the dangers they imply that produce a true sense of horror. Each player knows that he or she is about to encounter the monstrous—that one cannot elude the hunters forever. Thus the anticipation of monstrous contact produces the horrific experience that transcends mere violence. The game atmosphere can provoke fear by causing uncertainty in players who do not know where the monsters are even as they receive dire warnings of imminent attacks. Each such warning—that a monster stalks through the mist—promises that crucial possibility of contact.

Requiem's designers condition players to expect fear by providing "spooky" effects and visual reminders of how precarious life is (each a *memento mori*). Deep colors, fog effects, and eerie sounds affect players' ability to see and hear exactly what is around them, enhancing their fear of the horrors that lurk just out of sight. For example, one player found it particularly distressing when he entered the "Cursed Forest, which is covered in thick, black mist, and powerful, horrifying monsters spawned all around." Psychological conditioning can lead a participant to experience fear,⁴⁸ so as players navigate through barren towns, cemeteries, and dark forests featuring skeletons dangling from tree limbs, they remember that the world is one of danger and death—even for them.

The post-apocalyptic towns and cities in *DayZ* are also peppered with reminders of death and danger. The entire game region includes the towns, fields and forests, hills and mountains, coastal area, military camps, airfields, and smaller habitations. Towns and cities are particularly desirable destinations as they contain valuable resources, but are hence as dangerous as they are alluring. Other players are there, too, perhaps waiting for the unwary. Crashed cars litter the sides of the roads and buildings are barren and deserted. Indeed, since anyone inside is either a zombie or a potentially dangerous player, players want the buildings to be empty. But every hiding place, every potential lookout from higher ground indicates how exposed the player is, how vulnerable he or she is to predation in a world where only predators remain.

While the landscape reveals over and again that players are alone and threatened, the game mechanics provide most of the atmospheric elements that frighten players in *DayZ*. In our survey, many respondents commented that the survival-horror atmosphere is what drew them to the game, and many suggested that the atmospheric effects be enhanced with better music, environmental cues (perhaps the mere emptiness of the landscape should be enhanced with the aftermath of violent conflict?⁴⁹), and more dangerous zombies, among

other possibilities. At present, however, the mechanics—especially resource limitations—carry more of the burden than the visual and auditory environment. Survival-horror games frequently leave players lonely and desperate by restricting access to resources,⁵⁰ and *DayZ* follows this strategy: food, water, bandages, and weaponry are limited and sought after. Players appreciate this aspect of the game, such as one who commented, “I like how real it feels to be able to have a character that has to eat and drink to be healthy and survive.” Even light becomes a scarce resource. Without night vision goggles, players must light flares that illuminate only a small area of the nighttime (and these, too, are limited in number). Though the zombies and other players are no fiercer than in daytime, the darkness makes them more challenging, more surprising, and more frightening.

The finality of death means that life itself is a scarce resource, one which many games rely on to create powerful emotions. One online commentator avers, “You must **FEAR** death. Whether the penalty is permadeath or simply a day of being unable to play that character, death must be something to **FEAR**. Without that, there is no horror and survival is meaningless. Monsters must be threats to be avoided or removed, not resources to be ‘farmed.’ This is where a lot of zombie games fall down. If you are hunting them, it isn’t survival horror. If **THEY** are hunting you, then it **is**. The goal is **TO SURVIVE**.⁵¹ Thus the “real” death of characters in *DayZ* raises the stakes of game play, and thereby adds to the horrific appeal, while the many facets of each player’s struggle to survive leaves every player “riddled with tension.”⁵² For many players, even the fact that others’ deaths will be permanent raises the stakes of the game, as when they are forced to kill other players just to avoid being killed themselves.⁵³

It is not merely the loss of gear that a player has acquired that makes death frightening in *DayZ*. The survival theme and the constancy of danger lead players to a state of anxiety that is both stressful and the reason they return. *DayZ* is, admittedly, what Christopher Goetz calls an “accretion fantasy,” where the accumulation of equipment helps to make the player less vulnerable.⁵⁴ But the game’s fans generally enjoy, rather than avoid, the combination of permanent death (and hence loss of accrued gear) and the drive to strengthen their characters and make them safe. Experienced players acknowledge that gear is temporary and that one must not be attached to it.⁵⁵ Permadeath is an important part of the game, but the experience is intellectually and emotionally more significant than a backpack full of virtual equipment. Many players actually enjoy the process of the early stages in the game (see Fig. 1), so starting over is not universally problematic.



FIG. 1 Results regarding death in *DayZ* (in percent responding), where 1 = "it ruins my day" and 5 = "it is fun to start over" (n = 7166, average = 3.07).

But even these players still experience keen paranoia and anxiety over the threats lurking all around them.⁵⁶ According to one player:

I've become a good survivor. I can get well geared up pretty easily and am a force to be reckoned with . . . but I'm still so bloody scared. I'm not scared of loosing [sic] my gear . . . I'm just scared . . . thinking I'm gonna be ambushed constantly . . . creeping around [zombies] gives me goose bumps & the hairs on the back of neck stand up [sic] . . . I'm turning into a complete nervous wreck. The game has become a roller coaster of an anxiety trip for me. I have never been so affected by a game before, ever . . . it's bloody epic.⁵⁷

DayZ players relish these frightening moments; the fear and anxiety bring them back to the game (see Fig. 2). Survey respondents frequently refer to how the game scares them. *DayZ*'s designer Dean Hall would no doubt be thrilled by such comments. Regarding the game, he has said, "It's the sort of game that I want to play. When I play a game, I want to be moved. It's like you read a good book or [see] a good movie: you want to feel something . . . I want to feel something compelling and real out of the experience."⁵⁸ In this effort, Hall has no doubt been resoundingly successful. One survey respondent writes, "Thank you for this game, I've felt every feeling possible playing it, from feeling betrayed to exceptionally evil and the elation of victory against all odds," and another says he has largely given up playing other games because they cannot compare to *DayZ*,

How much do you enjoy the feeling of being frightened in DayZ?

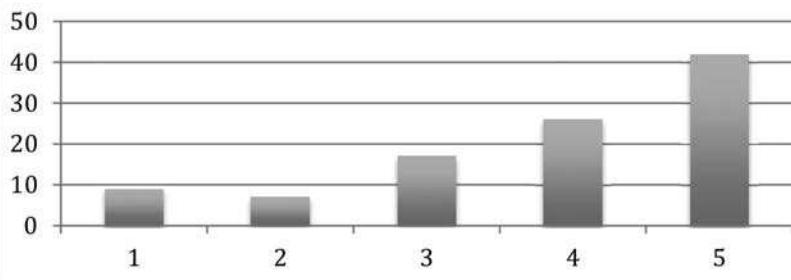


FIG. 2 Results for the enjoyment of experiencing fear (in percent responding), where 1 = "not at all, that's not why I play" and 5 = "very much, that's why I find it [the game] interesting" ($n = 7166$, average = 3.85).

which is "one hell of a rollercoaster from boredom to heart pounding." A number of respondents even complain that the game is not frightening *enough* and wish to see greater emphasis on the horrific aspects of it. They report that *DayZ* is the "only game that makes my blood pump," a "rollercoaster of emotions," and how they "love the feeling of not being able to trust anyone except your friends." Such comments are only the tip of the iceberg, but they are echoed throughout the survey responses.

Of course, players can become desensitized to any game, and even *DayZ* can lose its horrific—and hence alluring—effect. But even in these moments players fervently recall their early experiences and yearn for the days when they crawled across the landscape, cowering: "I'd trade all my knowledge about *DayZ* just to go back to those days where the game was fresh and scary. I've never in my life played a game even remotely close to the feeling that *DayZ* gave off, just writing this now I have a smile on my face remembering how immersive and exciting it was."⁵⁹ Fortunately, the unpredictability of other human beings keeps the game interesting even after it has become routine. As one survey respondent describes it: "As a new player, the entire game was somewhat terrifying. Once you've played for awhile and start to understand what can and cannot happen, especially with the zombies, the only thing that still really gets your heart going is seeing another player." Not seeing the other player, naturally, can make matters even worse.

Compared to *DayZ*, death is only inconvenient in *Requiem*; but the game has a more expansive visual universe to create a frightening environment. The diversity of the game's monsters is one of its strengths. Players enjoy *Requiem*'s monsters aesthetically and because the monsters make the game challenging. One player describes the monsters as "remarkable, both in terms of their appearance and their considerable strength against lower level players. I liked the 'intestine guy' the most. I cannot quite remember the monster's name . . . but it was one of the first Nightmare monsters. I distinctly remember the monster because it gave me a little fright—it looked grotesque in itself, and I, being an inexperienced player at that time, attempted to take him on singlehandedly."

Warnings of ensuing attacks, typically through the chat interface, serve simultaneously to aid effective game play and provoke players' fear of impending doom. The game may warn, for example, that a monster "has thrown a spit ball at you" or describe a monster's attack, preparing the player for the battle. The wandering monsters are constraints on player choices, helping to produce the balance of forces that Krzywinska argues is key to the experience of horror.⁶⁰ For an inexperienced player with limited skills and weapons, an imminent attack from a monster can be particularly frightening.

Requiem players are more vulnerable to attacks during the Nightmare Hours from 11 p.m. to 2 a.m., and are thus subject to additional stress in that period. In the Nightmare Hours, a different set of monsters appears; these are more aggressive and more powerful. The higher danger during Nightmare Hours produces greater anxiety for players, as the stakes are high and players have a greater chance of dying. Although more dangerous and difficult, Nightmare Hours provide players with valuable rewards and increased experience points, so the players have extrinsic motivation for adventuring during that time. Most of the *Requiem* players interviewed agreed that the rewards associated with these particularly frightening regions are enough incentive to return.

Even without the increased rewards, many players would return to the Nightmare Hours willingly. The thrill of playing during Nightmare Hours is a common feeling experienced among *Requiem* players because the Nightmare Hours are, as one player avers, "quite thrilling, especially when attempted alone." The players in *Requiem* thus become—much like the players who hunt one another in *DayZ*—monsters themselves. No longer will they flee; instead, the players stalk the monsters, becoming the predators.⁶¹

But the experience of fear in *DayZ* or *Requiem* is an opportunity to master that emotion. Survey respondents (see Fig. 3) positively describe their postgame feelings, with a substantial majority feeling that *DayZ* game play is mildly or

Degree to which players find playing DayZ cathartic

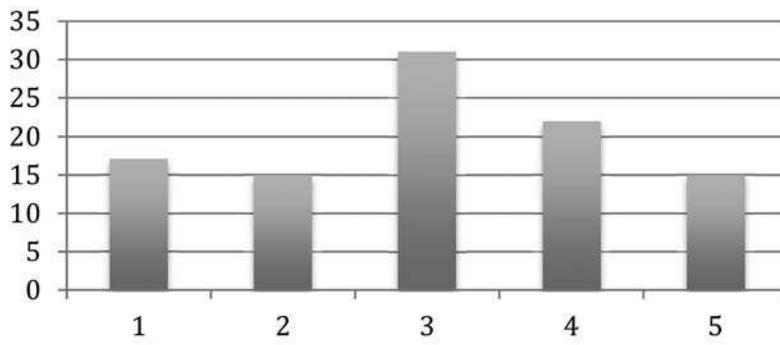


FIG. 3 Degree to which players find playing *DayZ* cathartic (in percent responding), where 1 = not at all and 5 = very much (n = 7166, average = 3.03).

very cathartic (68 percent rate the degree of cathartic relief as a 3 or higher out of 5), and their postgame emotions corroborate this: 33 percent claim to feel relaxed and another 23 percent amused. Only 7 percent of respondents indicated that they feel scared and anxious *after* playing even though many players are scared or anxious *while* playing.⁶² Furthermore, among those surveyed, *DayZ* is far more likely to make life, overall, less frightening than the reverse. Although most survey respondents feel that playing the game has not changed their daily lives, a substantial 20 percent feel that things are less frightening now than before they started playing *DayZ* (compared to only 3 percent who feel that things are more frightening). The cathartic release of horror games predates *DayZ*,⁶³ but *DayZ* has captivated a vast player base, and thus the data from our survey represents a major empirical step forward in our understanding of videogames and pop culture.

Dread is the key to the success of *DayZ* and *Requiem*, as it differentiates them from other online games. Most interviewees found them refreshing after what they described as the “dull” fantasy worlds that dominate the market. *DayZ*’s and *Requiem*’s designers have produced games where danger lurks around every corner, and they condition players to perceive such threats through game mechanics, the landscape, and stories that contextualize the players’ desperate quest for survival. Players enjoy the thrill of horror and feel

subsequent relief after playing in such worlds. In *DayZ*, however, the terrifying possibility that other players are the monsters who hunt raises the stakes and reminds us of the evolutionary response to agency in the environment. A shadow flitting across the screen could be a sign of impending doom, but more likely at the rifle of a hidden human sniper than at the hands and mouth of a mindless zombie.

CONCLUSION

The connection between monstrosity and videogames has not emerged *ex nihilo* along with the electronic gaming market. The practice of demonic and monstrous embodiment is millennia old, perhaps as old as storytelling in all its forms.⁶⁴ Making monsters into something we control is an old strategy, visible in myths and religious practices, but videogames certainly add a new dimension to this process. They democratize access and provide opportunities for identification and heroic action. The increasing power of games to do this adds to their appeal, accessibility, and meaning.

Virtual worlds continue to gain popularity, allowing thousands or millions of players from around the globe to immerse themselves in alternate realities. The variety of virtual worlds users choose indicates that each—and its accompanying thematic emphases—has a place in our culture. *Requiem: Memento Mori* and *DayZ* players enter dreadful landscapes filled with mutated animals, monsters, demons or zombies, and even monstrous human beings who stalk their own kind, “feeding” off the corpses by stripping them of goods. Such monsters represent the irrational, the repressed, and the wholly other. These inner experiences are remade in horror gaming, fashioned into tangible monsters that players can explicitly and directly engage. Although vanquishing our psychological fears can be a tremendous struggle, we can cathartically do so by slaying the embodiment of those fears. As such, horror gaming—while reminding us of the limitations of the Enlightenment project—is simultaneously part of that project, an opportunity to rationally constrain that which lurks in the darkness of human life. That these games exist shows that we need horror. The demonic and the monstrous appear in pop culture because they represent evil and our fears and anxieties. It is our human nature to be attracted to the horrific and obtain pleasure from encountering it because this is how we gain a partial and temporary victory over ourselves.

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NOTES

1. Games also seem to provoke horror in U.S. political culture, where a fear of cultural decline percolates through public discussion. William Bainbridge notes that there have been substantive attacks on virtual world research by members of the U.S. Congress, often executed without proper attention to the truth of the accusations. William Sims Bainbridge, *eGods: Faith versus Fantasy in Computer Gaming* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 36–37.

2. Sigmund Freud, *Future of an Illusion*, trans. James Strachey, repr. of 1961 translation published by Hogarth (New York: Norton, [1927] 1989).

3. See Jeffrey J. Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey J. Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 8.

4. William Sims Bainbridge and Wilma Bainbridge, "Electronic Game Research Methodologies: Studying Religious Implications," *Review of Religious Research* 49, no. 1 (2007): 35–36. See also Robert M. Geraci, *Virtually Sacred: Myth and Meaning in World of Warcraft and Second Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

5. Ewen Kirkland, "Restless Dreams in *Silent Hill*: Approaches to Videogame Analysis," *Journal of Media Practice* 6, no. 3 (2005): 167–78; Tanya Krzywinska, "Hands-On Horror," *Spectator* 22, no. 2 (2002): 12–23; Bernard Perron, ed., *Horror Video Games: Essays on the Fusion of Fear and Play* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2009).

6. See, e.g., Jeremy Biles, "Monstrous Technologies and the Telepathology of Everyday Life," in *Monster Culture in the 21st Century: A Reader*, ed. Marina Levina and Diem-My T. Bui (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 147–62; Jeffrey Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero Comics, and the Paranormal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 296; Gregory L. Reece, *Creatures of the Night: In Search of Ghosts, Vampires, Werewolves, and Demons* (New York: I. B. Taurus, 2012).

7. Brenda S. Gardenour Walter, "Silent Hill and Fatal Frame: Finding Transcendent Horror in and beyond the Haunted Magic Circle," in *Playing with Religion in Digital Games*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell and Gregory Price Grieve (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 91–92.
8. See, e.g., Bonnie Nardi, *My Life as a Night Elf Priest: An Anthropological Account of World of Warcraft* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Celia Pearce and Artemesia, *Communities of Play: Emergent Cultures in Multiplayer Games and Virtual Worlds* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009).
9. Survey users are required to cite the three authors of this paper, and reference that the data were first published in this paper. To access the data, visit <http://tinyurl.com/dayzsurvey>.
10. Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, [1917] 1958), 31.
11. See, e.g., Cohen, "Monster Culture"; Reece, *Creatures of the Night*.
12. W. Scott Poole, *Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsession with the Hideous and the Haunting* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2011), 15.
13. See Cari Keebaugh, "All the Better to Eat You[r Brains] With, My Dear": Sex, Violence, and *Little Red Riding Hood's Zombie BBQ* as Fairy Tale Recovery Project," *Journal of Popular Culture* 46, no. 3 (2013): 589–603.
14. Todd Tremlin, *Minds and Gods: The Cognitive Foundations of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
15. Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, 40.
16. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. C. J. M. Hubback (New York: Bartleby, 1922), 35.
17. See Nardi, *My Life as a Night Elf Priest*, 11–12; Timothy Rowlands, *Videogame Worlds: Working at Play in the Culture of EverQuest* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: Left Coast Press, 2012), 45, 76.
18. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow and the Foundations of Positive Psychology: The Collected Works of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi* (Dordrecht, Neth.: Springer, 2014), 7.
19. Ibid., 8.
20. Cohen, "Monster Culture," 4; see also David D. Gilmore, *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 191.
21. Jason C. Bivins, "By Demons Driven: Religious Teratologies," in *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology*, ed. Caroline Joan S. Picart and John Edgar Browning (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 105; see also Poole, *Monsters in America*. Martin Rogers also offers tantalizing glimpses into the rhetoric of monstrous representation as a reaction to social anxieties, including human commodification, eugenics, and other modernist concerns. See Rogers, "Monstrous Modernism and *The Day of the Locust*," *Journal of Popular Culture* 44, no. 2 (2011): 367–84.
22. Brady DeSanti, "The Cannibal Talking Head: The Portrayal of the Windigo 'Monster' in Popular Culture and Ojibwe Traditions," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 27, no. 3 (2015): 188. Although "wendigo" is more popular in contemporary usage, DeSanti prefers the alternate spelling "windigo." The word is also occasionally transliterated from the Ojibwe as "wintiko."

23. David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 156.

24. *Ibid.*, 143.

25. "Dayz = The Walking Dead," Reddit, 2016, https://www.reddit.com/r/dayz/comments/3v1u4y/dayz_the_walking_dead/.

26. Gareth Schott, "Dawn of the Digital Dead: The Zombie as Interactive Social Satire in American Popular Culture," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 29, no. 1 (2010): 61–75.

27. Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenz, "Infection, Media, and Capitalism: From Early Modern Plagues to Postmodern Zombies," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2010): 126–47.

28. Kyle Bishop, "The Idle Proletariat: *Dawn of the Dead*, Consumer Ideology, and the Loss of Productive Labor," *Journal of Popular Culture* 43, no. 2 (2010): 234–35; Schott, "Dawn of the Digital Dead," 66–67.

29. See Amanda Phillips, "Shooting to Kill: Headshots, Twitch Reflexes, and the Mechropolitics of Video Games," *Games and Culture*, November 6, 2015, 8, doi:10.1177/1555412015612611.

30. *Ibid.*

31. Tilo Hartmann, Erhan Toz, and Marvin Brandon, "Just a Game? Unjustified Virtual Violence Produces Guilt in Empathetic Players," *Media Psychology* 13, no. 4 (2010): 339–63. Not even academics are immune to the ethical engines of videogames. See, e.g., Theodore A. Turnau, "Infecting the World: Popular Culture and the Perception of Evil," *Journal of Popular Culture* 38, no. 2 (2004): 393–94.

32. Matthew Grizzard, Ron Tamborini, Robert J. Lewis, Lu Wang, and Sujay Prabhu, "Being Bad In a Videogame Can Make Us More Morally Sensitive," *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 17, no. 8 (2014): 499–504; see also Robert M. Geraci and Nat Recine, "A Moral Galaxy: War and Suffering in *Star Wars: The Old Republic*," *Religion Dispatches*, December 15, 2015, <http://religiondispatches.org/a-star-wars-videogame-invites-players-to-the-dark-side/>.

33. Alternately, it may be that the "cannibalism" running rampant through *DayZ* simply extends the cinematic pattern in which military horror films show the dissolution of broad social kinship. Such films portray the meltdown of larger social groups and valorize small groups of companions. See Steffen Hantke, "The Military Horror Film: Speculations on a Hybrid Genre," *Journal of Popular Culture* 43, no. 4 (2010): 716. Our respondents claim that they fear strangers in *DayZ* but form very close relationships with friends. Thus we recognize that cinematic studies complement videogame studies, even as we have suggested that horror game analysis has, perhaps, overstated the importance of cinema. Our prior remarks were meant only to emphasize the need for a wider approach to pop culture, not to delegitimize research that takes its lead from cinema. If, however, one is to move into game studies, one must account for the specific social processes at play in games. Online games afford a powerful sense of community, and the social nature of gaming is among the reasons why online games can influence life. See Bainbridge and Bainbridge, "Electronic Game Research Methodologies," 36. When isolating themselves from conventional society, gamers immerse themselves in a virtual realm and its society. See T. L. Taylor, *Play between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 36–38. Consequently, the nature of such worlds is

worthy of considerable thought. In games with horror and survival themes, the possibilities of individual transformation are interesting, as these games create opportunities for players to suspect the trustworthiness of strangers and struggle toward actual (or apparent) trustworthiness themselves. This is especially vital to game play in *DayZ*, where players can steal from or even kill one another. It has been noted that players even kill researchers who hope to interview them. See Marcus Carter, Greg Wadley, and Martin Gibbs, "Friendly, Don't Shoot!: How Communication Design Can Enable Novel Social Interactions," in *Proceedings of the 24th Australian Computer-Human Interaction Conference*, ed. Vivienne Farrell, Graham Farrell, Caslon Chua, Weidong Huang, Raj Vasa, and Clinton Woodward (New York: ACM, 2012), 72–75.

34. Daniela Robles, "Dying to Play: How Death Mechanics in *Guild Wars* Provide Meaningful Experiences," in *Cultural Perspectives of Video Games: From Designer to Player*, ed. Adam L. Brackin and Natacha Guyot (Oxford, U.K.: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2012), 23–32.

35. Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, [1919] 1955), 220.

36. *Ibid.*, 233.

37. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Vail-Ballou [1966] 1980).

38. Cohen, "Monster Culture," 16–17.

39. Timothy Crick, "The Game Body: Toward a Phenomenology of Contemporary Video Gaming," *Games and Culture* 6, no. 3 (2011): 261.

40. *Ibid.*, 263–67.

41. Krzywinska, "Hands-On Horror," 12.

42. As of early 2014, *DayZ* servers held around fifty players. A typical MMORPG server includes thousands of players, though *Requiem* is not a popular game and so has a more modest population.

43. On the definition of "virtual world," see Mark Bell, "Toward a Definition of 'Virtual Worlds,'" *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research* 1, no. 1 (2008): 2–5; see also Geraci, *Virtually Sacred*, 202–8.

44. Coyote Sharptongue, "Coyote's Howling: Why a Horror MMORPG Won't Work," MMORPG.com, December 15, 2011, <http://www.mmorpg.com/showFeature.cfm/loadFeature/5910/Why-a-Horror-MMO-Wont-Work.html>.

45. Ewen Kirkland, "Storytelling in Survival Horror Videogames," in *Horror Video Games: Essays on the Fusion of Fear and Play*, ed. Bernard Perron (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2009), 62–78.

46. Quoted in Evan Lahti, "Day Z Interview: How Zombies + Arma 2 Created Gaming's Best Story Machine," PCGamer.com, May 16, 2012, <http://www.pcgamer.com/day-z-interview-how-zombies-arma-2-created-gamings-best-story-machine/>.

47. Flaviu Ioan Patrunjel, "The Hunt for Horror in the *Resident Evil* Franchise: Games versus Movies," presented at the Fourth International Conference on Videogame Cultures and the Future of Interactive Entertainment, July 13, 2012.

48. Beth A. Kattelman, "Magic, Monsters and Movies: America's Midnight Ghost Shows" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1999), 12.

49. There are places, such as where a plane crashed into a building, where the violence of *DayZ*'s landscape is directly visible, rather than implicit in the silence.

50. See Carl Therrien, "Games of Fear: A Multifaceted Historical Account of the Horror Genre in Videogames," in *Horror Video Games: Essays on the Fusion of Fear and Play*, ed. Bernard Perron (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2009), 37.

51. MMO_Doubter, comment on Sharptongue, "Coyote's Howling," no longer accessible.

52. Phill Cameron, "Day Z: A Videogame Exploration of the Best and Worst of Human Nature," *The Telegraph*, March 29, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/video-games/10729974/Day-Z-A-video-game-exploration-of-the-best-and-worst-of-human-nature.html>; see also Carter, Wadley, and Gibbs, "Friendly, Don't Shoot!" Gaming experiences are both "voyeuristic" and "visceral." See Doris C. Rusch, *Computer Games as Sociocultural Phenomenon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). Because we play them from the perspective of one or perhaps a few characters, they limit our empathetic identification to a narrow range; but they heighten the response within that range because of the visceral elements of play. See Chad Habel and Ben Kooiman, "Agency Mechanics: Gameplay Design in Survival Horror Videogames," *Digital Creativity* 25, no. 1 (2014): 2.

53. Marcus Carter, Martin Gibbs, and Greg Wadley, "Death and Dying in DayZ," in *Proceedings of the 9th Australasian Conference on Interactive Entertainment: Matters of Life and Death* (New York: ACM, 2013), 4.

54. Christopher Goetz, "Tether and Accretions: Fantasy as Form in Video Games," *Games and Culture* 7, no. 6 (2012): 420.

55. See the comment thread replying to BenitoProfane, "I Have DayZ Shell Shock: Anyone Else, or Am I Just a Wuss?" *Forums.Dayz.com*, June 7, 2013, <http://forums.dayzgame.com/index.php?/topic/138505-i-have-dayz-shell-shock-anyone-else-or-am-i-just-a-wuss/>.

56. See BenitoProfane, "I Have DayZ Shell Shock."

57. MadTommy, "Tense Paranoid, Nervous Wreck . . . Epic Game," *Forums.Dayz.com*, July 20, 2012, <http://forums.dayzgame.com/index.php?/topic/39191-tense-paranoid-nervous-wreck-epic-game/>.

58. Quoted in Lahti, "Day Z Interview."

59. AussieStig, comment on BenitoProfane, "I Have DayZ Shell Shock."

60. Krzywinska, "Hands-On Horror," 16.

61. See Stephen T. Asma, *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 100–101; Órít Kámír, "What Makes Stalking Monsters So Monstrous, and How to Survive Them?" in *Speaking of Monsters: A Teratological Anthology*, ed. Caroline Joan S. Picart and John Edgar Browning (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 161–72.

62. Respondents were able to choose from among amused, anxious, attentive, curious, excited, relaxed, scared, talkative, and other. The options were randomly assorted for each survey taker, in order to reduce listing bias.

63. See Keebaugh, "All the Better to Eat You[r Brains] With, My Dear."

64. In contrast, Švelch claims that videogames mark a new way of engaging monsters: "What we are witnessing is a major shift in our conceptualization of monstrosity. The logic of informatics control has now colonized even the things we fear: our monsters, previously deemed to be inscrutable and abject." See Jaroslav Švelch, "Monsters by the Numbers: Controlling Monstrosity in Videogames," in *Monster Culture in the 21st Century: A Reader*, ed. Marina Levina and Diem-My T. Bui (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 195.